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SUBJECT: BATTLELINES DRAWN IN FIGHT FOR CONTROL OF PDP

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[1](#)B. LAGOS 1220

[1](#)C. ABUJA 3030

[1](#)D. LAGOS 1399

Classified By: Ambassador John Campbell for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: The PDP convention scheduled for Dec. 16 may be one of the most significant political gatherings in Nigeria's post-independence history and its outcome, for better or worse, could have a significant impact on Nigerian politics for years to come. With President Obasanjo's popularity at perhaps its lowest point during his presidency and the balance of power within the party uncertain, the convention appears to be a wide open contest. President Obasanjo appears focused on assuaging his bitter and unexpected third term defeat by exiting the stage on his terms. In order to do that, he will attempt to dictate the outcome of the PDP convention by controlling the process and hand picking a successor. There will be strong opposition to this within the PDP, as numerous factions within the party see this as against their interests. This raises the stakes for a President who talks incessantly about his legacy and hopes to anoint a successor who he hopes will provide succor and a political firewall after he retires. END SUMMARY

PDP: NIGERIA'S BIG TENT, A BRIEF HISTORY

[1](#)2. (U) The People's Democratic Party is an amalgam of interests which traces its formation to a group of northern leaders who opposed the dictatorship of Sani Abacha. These opponents dubbed themselves the G-18 and announced their intention to oppose Abacha's attempt to have himself elected president. Ironically, many of this group had previously served as ministers under Abacha, including Jerry Gana, Abubakar Rimi, Adamu Ciroma, and Solomon Lar. The group also brought in representatives of the political association of Shehu Musa Yar'adua, known as the People's Democratic Movement (PDM), including Atiku Abubakar and northern intellectuals like Usman Bugaje.

[1](#)3. (U) The G-18 teamed up with a group of southern politicians, most prominently Alex Ekueme and Bola Ige, to form a national organization called the G-34. As the group grew in prominence it also drew in other "Abacha politicians," who had actively worked for Abacha, like Tony Anenih and Jim Nwobodo as well as retired army generals, including Ibrahim Babangida and Aliyu Mohammed Gusau.

[1](#)4. (U) The great influx of political opportunists and hangers-on into the PDP changed the party from one founded on principled opposition to dictatorship to the political equivalent of a big tent where all comers, no matter how disreputable, were welcome. This led many of the Southwestern politicians who had mobilized their own anti-Abacha organization known as National Democratic Coalition of Nigeria (NADECO) to pull out of PDP and found the Alliance

for Democracy (AD). Bola Ige told journalists at the time that the Yoruba politicians believed the PDP was northern dominated and they were not ready to share the same political platform with those "who wine and dine with military dictators."

15. (C) In the run-up to the 1999 elections, and against great odds, the military contingent within the PDP put forward Olusegun Obasanjo, a nominee who they believed would protect their interests and had the right ethnic profile. This group is alleged to have forged a deal in which Obasanjo would turn over power after a single term. After legendary intrigue at the party convention in Jos, Obasanjo and Atiku emerged as the party's candidates. The PDP went on to win the 1999 and 2003 presidential elections as well as a solid majority of the Gubernatorial and National Assembly seats during both elections. Its dominance in the 2003 elections was so great that, except for pockets in the North, winning the PDP primary was tantamount to winning the general election.

16. (C) Currently there are three primary cliques within the PDP all poised to play a crucial role in deciding who emerges as the PDP flag bearer. These are the old line political/military power block; the Obasanjo camp, comprising business moguls and technocrats who owe their relevance to the favorable treatment they have received since 1999; and the sitting governors who control resources and party structures at the state level. Each has its own interests and alliances, but survival, not loyalty, remains the name of the game. As a result, the upcoming convention is likely to see shifting alliances as each bloc tries to outwit and outplay the others in this ultimate game of political survival.

#### INTEREST GROUP 1: THE MILITARY AND OLD LINE POLITICIANS

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17. (C) The historical alliance of the military and their old line political cronies has, historically, been the most important in Nigeria. Led by its military members, this group was responsible for the election of Obasanjo and has played an important role in PDP politics. Although the base of this group is centered in the north, members, especially politicians, hail from all over the country. Prominent among the military members are retired generals Ibrahim Babangida, T.Y. Danjuma, Abdulsalami Abubakar, Aliyu Mohammed Gusau, and Jerry Useni. Prominent among the civilian members are Jerry Gana, Tony Anenih and Adamu Ciroma.

18. (C) President Obasanjo has worked assiduously since 1999 to reduce their influence within the party as well as their access to lucrative state directed resources. He retired many officers who formed a bridge to his administration. In addition to cutting off members of this group from the country's famously lucrative patronage networks, the President created a new patronage network which is loyal to him. The cumulative affects of these actions led the military/old line politicians to mobilize actively against the third term.

19. (C) It is clear that for this bloc the PDP convention is a vital test of its historical predominance. The strength of the group rests on their common desire to remove their former ally, Obasanjo, who has spared no effort in his attempts to reduce their influence over Nigerian politics and to remake the party in his own image. But this group is unlikely to surrender power easily, even after losing in the primaries. Meanwhile, at the convention it is likely this group will attempt to forge an alliance with the sitting governors to try to wrest power from Obasanjo. The major weakness of this group is that many of its members are opportunistic at heart. Their individual desire for economic and political rewards makes them susceptible to inducements, thus weakening this group's solidarity, especially at crucial moments.

¶10. (C) This group is led by Obasanjo himself and includes his kitchen cabinet, members of his economic team, selected members of the first power bloc and members of the business community who benefited from Obasanjo's sale of public companies. Many but not all members of this group are newcomers, holding political appointments for first time in their careers. Prominent members of Obasanjo's block of the party include Aliyu Dangote, chairman and chief executive of Dangote Conglomerates; Femi Odetola, owner of Zenon Oil; Andy Uba, Obasanjo's aide; Nasir el-Rufai, minister of the Federal Capital Territory; Charles Soludo, Central Bank Governor; Ndidi Okereke, chairperson of Nigerian Stock Exchange and chairperson of Obasanjo's Transcorp conglomerate; Nuhu Riabadu, chairman of EFCC; Oby Ezekwesili, minister of Education; and Bode George, a retired Air Force officer and now head of the PDP convention. Recently joining the group is Governor Umaru Musa Yar'Adua of Katsina State, who may be the anointed candidate for the Presidency. They are loyalists, and more than any other group, owe their prominence and economic well-being to the President. If the President is unable to control his succession, they are likely to lose relevance.

¶11. (C) This group provided the muscle and money for the Third Term project which was defeated in May 2006. After its defeat, this group developed "the plan to control Nigeria for the next forty years," and keep Obasanjo as its leader from his lifetime position in the ruling party (ref a). One part of the strategy has involved using the EFCC to cow governors and other political heavyweights who have the potential to kick against their convention plans. The EFCC provides an instrument for members of the inner clique to promote their own personal agendas, including promoting the candidacy of El-Rufai or another preferred alternative (ref b).

¶12. (C) The EFCC's recent actions have been politically charged. In August 2006, it briefly detained Mohammed Babangida, the eldest son of ex-president IBB, for allegedly owning shares in GlobalCom, one of Nigeria's private communications companies. He was subsequently released without charges. His arrest was linked to his father's ambition to contest in 2007. In October 2006, Ribadu appeared before the National Assembly and said that 31 out of 36 governors were being investigated for corrupt practices. In December 2006, local media reported the arrest and detentions of government officials in Enugu, Kaduna and Rivers States. All three governors (Chimaroke Nnamani, Ahmed Makarfi and Peter Odili) are contesting the presidential primaries (ref c).

¶13. (C) In laying the groundwork for managing the convention,

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President Obasanjo is relying on Bode George, who is the chairman of the PDP convention committee. George, a retired Air Force officer, was one of the principal promoters of the Third Term project. He owes great loyalty to the President who has apparently saved him from prison after the EFCC indicted him for mismanagement during his tenure as chairman of Nigerian Port Authority (NPA).

¶14. (C) George has been working with the President and other party insiders to reduce the number of candidates vying for presidential nomination. There are currently 30 contenders, but the party has set up a screening committee, which it has signaled it will use to cut down the number, and choose the finalists. The screening committee is headed by Bayo Akinola and includes Joseph Wayas and Evan Enwerem, among others.

¶15. (C) The committee's squeeze has already resulted in Ibrahim Babangida quitting the party, after he alleged the committee was set to disqualify him. Although the committee is set to begin its work on December 11 and make its decision

public two days later, its utility is clear: giving the presidential bloc the upper hand at the convention. As a result, the finalists will all have been sanctioned by the president as part of his attempt to manage the outcome of the convention.

¶16. (C) Yet, despite this careful preparation, a well-placed source told us that the President would be happy to see the convention become rancorous if his own candidate (not yet definitively identified) did not carry the day. The confusion and bitterness arising from the conduct of the primaries would overheat the polity. This, coupled with the incompetence of INEC in the ongoing voter registration, could provide a pretext for a State of Emergency, or at least a legally allowable delay in the elections. The major weakness of this group is that it neither controls the party machinery in majority of the states nor has grassroots support. It relies solely on the instruments of the state and funds itself through the various Ministries under its control.

#### INTEREST GROUP 3: SITTING GOVERNORS

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¶17. (C) The PDP governors, the final group within the PDP, have the resources and motivation to determine the final outcome of the party's presidential primaries. Many of the governors have suffered the wrath of the President's anger and most are leaving office but looking to stay relevant and out of jail. About 20 have announced their intention to seek the party's nomination. The Governors have tremendous sway over state politics and most control party structures at the state and local levels. This is the same bloc that openly challenged Obasanjo when they opposed the re-nomination of President Obasanjo as the party's flag bearer for the 2003 elections. Many have been in disfavor since then and several have been removed or impeached.

¶18. (C) Results from recent PDP gubernatorial primaries show that sitting governors have exercised considerable control over the PDP nominations of their successors. Thus in Kaduna, Katsina, Rivers, Taraba, Bauchi, Edo, Jigawa and Enugu, the sitting governors have turned out to be the dominant powerbrokers, with or without the support of the presidency. In states like Benue and Lagos, where there has been direct competition between the Presidency and the sitting governors, the competition has ended in a stalemate. In Benue state, the Presidency wants the position to be rotated to the Edoma speaking zone, while the sitting governor wants it to remain in the Tiv speaking zone. In Lagos, the presidency is pushing the candidacy of the widow of slain candidate Funsho Williams, while Governor Tinubu wants another candidate. Self interest of the sitting governors, especially in choosing a successor who will help protect them once they leave office, rather than currying favor with the Presidency, seems to be the strongest incentive for action.

¶19. (C) Currently, the governors have been consulting and insisting that the next President of Nigeria must come from their ranks. A source told us that a list was submitted to President Obasanjo after the governors had conducted an in-house selection process. With the EFCC reports dangling over them, coupled with the fact most of them are vacating power in 2007, the governors are poised to give Obasanjo's camp a run for its money (ref d). The primary weakness of this group is that most are worried about the prospect of the EFCC tightening its noose on them as their immunity runs out. The pursuit of their individual ambitions in winning the party ticket may also weaken their collective resolve to defeat Obasanjo's group.

#### OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

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¶20. (C) The religious and traditional leaders may also have

some influence on the primaries. However, fluidity and inconsistency among the members this group ensure they will have, at best, a corollary role. Nonetheless, each of the three power blocs can be expected to court these leaders in an effort to win or stalemate the convention. In the North, some members of this group were already working behind-the-scenes with similar groups from other regions to ensure the power is taken back to the North through a nationally acceptable arrangement. On the other hand, Obasanjo's camp continues using religious and ethnic leaders in the South to frustrate any peaceful call for a power shift to the North and to further fragment the southern regions' political cohesiveness. While Obasanjo still appears to personally prefer a Southerner to succeed him, if it must be the North, "it must be someone Obasanjo can control," one contact explained.

#### COMMENT

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121. COMMENT: The situation within the PDP remains opaque. With the removal of about half of the incumbent Senators and National Assembly members and the term limits removing most of the surviving PDP Governors, the Convention provides the potential for fireworks and unexpected consequences. If the Governors agree to cooperate among themselves, they could attract many of the more traditional group of PDP insiders to their cause. As observed in the efforts to halt the Third Term Agenda earlier this year, opposition to Obasanjo can provide a rallying point and bring the disparate interests together for a common cause. If they are unable to control the Convention, the stage is set for an unpopular (and perhaps weak) candidate picked by the President to compete in the 2007 elections. The opportunity for Obasanjo's opponents to coalesce and present a consensus candidate with widespread popularity would be encouraged by this outcome.

CAMPBELL